

The Importance of Positive Public Relations

Within a School Community

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In order to establish and sustain positive public relations within the school community, several factors must come into play. The climate within each school must be the result of support, collaboration, and a strong commitment among stakeholders. A respectful, disciplined, safe environment is key, in order to promote academic success, both in school and in the real world. All relationships with the school, especially those involving teacher to teacher, teacher to student, student to student, administrator to teacher, and administrator to student, must be made of mutual respect in order to effect change. The administrator needs to instill a culture of openness and collegiality among faculty and staff. Once a positive climate has been established and is sustained, outreach to parents, guardians, and the extended community becomes a priority (Brewster & Railsback, 2003).

The school leader must ensure that partnerships within the school are based upon a strong willingness to engage with students, families, and community members. There must be a clear vision for communication accountability, with all stakeholders being a part of the process (“National School Public Relations,” n.d., p. 1). The focus of any commitment should be on the three C’s of communication, collaboration and cooperation, which have guided this administrator’s efforts over the course of several decades in education. When teachers feel empowered to create a learning environment that is aligned to student and community needs, great things can happen. Through site-based school committees, teachers and administrators have an on-going opportunity to build upon valuable partnerships with parents, guardians, and members of the extended community. Once teachers receive administrative support to express ideas, feelings, and plans to move the school in a positive direction, a shift occurs. The old

paradigm that parenting is solely the parent's job becomes the new paradigm of everyone working together for each and every child (Garvis, 2016).

In the Belleville School System, under the leadership of our present superintendent, all stakeholders are encouraged to work together, in an effort to improve upon positive community relations. At School Number Five, all teachers are passionate about what they teach and are truly part of a team (family). Daily practices to promote and sustain communication and collaboration with parents and guardians are a priority. Families are invited to come in not only during planned assemblies and events, but also for special class projects. In addition, parents are afforded the opportunity to visit classrooms and to participate in the learning process. This collaboration enables teachers and parents/guardians to work together to ensure the success of each and every student, so that “learners can become leaders,” which is our school district’s mission.

According to Epstein (2016), communication among stakeholders is fostered through ongoing, open dialogue and parent involvement. Several times a year, School Five sends home newsletters written in English and Spanish that outline special happenings, programs, and components of study, which are part of the daily curriculum. Daily communication takes place in the form of written notes, phone calls, in-person conferences, comments scribed in daily planners and through on-line information resources. These practices help to strengthen the relations between school and home and bridge communication gaps.

In a concerted effort to strengthen relations with the extended community, several community engagement initiatives have been implemented this school year. Districtwide events and festivities are designed to engage our school community and our community-at-large in the

celebrating of our students' talents and abilities. School, family and community participation at these district sponsored events continues to grow and improve. It's very encouraging to witness.

Parental involvement in schools should always be welcomed. Although many parents/guardians may find it difficult to attend or volunteer at school functions during the day or at night, there are many ways to promote active parent participation and involvement. Parents can collaborate with teachers to find ways to support their children's learning. Reading to them and helping them with their homework are two important ways of being an important part of your child's education. In the event that a language barrier exists, the school can elicit support from faculty, staff, and other parents in order to effectively communicate with families ("Parents and Teachers Working Together," 2015). This endeavor has been underway in our district, as schools are presently inviting parents to come into the schools and receive support in utilizing online resources. Observing the excitement in the eyes of the students, when they realize their parents are involved, is indescribable. One of the most important points a principal can communicate to his/her parent population, is the belief that each of them is doing the best he can to raise strong, independent thinkers and learners.

Community leaders and role models must be encouraged to be a part of this process. Planning a "Career Day" in the school setting has proven to be a great success. Inviting community leaders of various occupations, local merchants, and school parents to speak to the students and demonstrate their occupations and career choices, excites the students. It impresses upon the students, the value of a strong work ethic and the importance of working towards an achievable goal (Kirschenbaum, n.d., p.14). We must be passionate about our students...our most valuable resource. In order to accomplish this goal, a strong vision for positive public relations within the school, home, and extended community is paramount.

## References

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